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ABSTRACT

For this study of the relationships between accuracy of political information and attention to various mass-media sources of public-affairs information, personal interviews were conducted with 388 eligible voters in Madison, Wisconsin, and 129 eligible voters in Lexington, Kentucky, during October 1972. Variables measured included education, political interest, campaign interest in the 1972 presidential campaign, public-affairs mass-media usage, knowledge of the political system, and ability to identify the major-party candidates' positions on major issues. Results supported four general conclusions: (1) Network news viewing has no discernible impact on either political accuracy or political system knowledge of first-time or older voters. (2) Public-affairs newspaper use has an independent effect on both accuracy and political system knowledge for young, inexperienced voters but not for older voters. (3) Public-affairs magazine use affects accuracy but not political system knowledge, for both age groups. (4) Interest in the campaign predicts accuracy for first-time voters only. (AA)

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MASS COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL ACCURACY

A Comparison of First-time and Older Voters

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In order to vote intelligently, a voter must assess what each candidate might do if elected. And if anything can predict what candidates might do, it is what they say they will do during the campaign.

Recent evidence indicates that American voters are guided increasingly by their assessment of candidates' issue stands. While studies of American voting behavior conducted during the 1940s and 1950s (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960) suggested that issue concerns had little impact on the vote compared with party identification, data collected during the 1960s and 1970s provide evidence of a reversal of this pattern. For example, Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1976) show that the correlation between party evaluations and the vote decline from .49 in 1960 to .39 in 1964 to .14 in 1972 while the correlation between issue evaluations and the vote increased from .47 in 1960 to .56 in 1964, remaining stable in 1972.

This decline in the association between party evaluations and voting behavior might be attributable partly to the fact that fewer people today identify with political parties than did in the 1950s (Dennis, 1975). Yet, as Dennis and Chaffee (forthcoming) note, among identifiers, the correlation between party identification and the vote has dropped from .70 in 1952 to .55 in 1972, suggesting that party alliances are losing strength as a determinant of the vote.

Thus, candidates' issue positions appear to be a significant factor in presidential voting. I will call the voter's ability to identify

correctly these positions accuracy.

THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING ACCURACY

Unlike most other forms of political knowledge, accuracy is based on information that is ephemeral and specific to the immediate situation. It is not learned in school, as is general knowledge of the workings of the political system. Since information about candidates' issue positions is transmitted only during the relatively short campaign period, it cannot be accumulated over long periods of time, except in the sense that an alert voter might be able to deduce a candidate's stand on a particular issue from accumulated knowledge about the candidate or party.

How then do people become accurate observers of a political campaign?

Early political research suggests that few do. During the 1948 presidential campaign, the candidates held distincly different positions on two issues--Taft-Hartley and price control. Yet, in their study of that election, Berelson et al. (1954) found that only 16% of their sample could identify accurately both candidates' stands. Similarly, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) found that most people are unable to discriminate broad differences between the major political parties. In 1952, just 30% of their national sample could identify differences in the stances of the Republican and Democratic parties on either welfare or internationalism.

It is not the absolute level of accuracy but the process by which it is acquired that is of interest here. Existing research suggests that this process is a complex one, involving (1) patterns of attention to public affairs mass media and (2) the person's cognitive and motivational preparation.

Mass Media Use

Since information about candidates and issues is transmitted

primarily by the mass media, it is logical to suspect that attention to public affairs media is a strong contributor to accuracy. In their 1948 study, Berelson et al. (1954) found that exposure to relevant news items in magazines, newspapers, and on the radio (Television was then a new and sparsely diffused medium.) was a stronger predictor of accuracy than was education or any of the other variables analyzed. Of those exhibiting high accuracy, (three or four correct out of four possible) 67% were catagorized as high on the communications exposure index.

Two more recent British studies (Trenaman and McQuail, 1961; Blumler and McQuail, 1969) suggest that certain types of political television programs can have informational effects. Utilizing a panel design, Trenaman and McQuail found a correlation of .11 between the number of party programs viewed and the increase in accuracy during the campaign. For those who changed parties during the campaign, the correlation was .32. But inconsistently with the earlier American study, gains in accuracy were not related to either radio or newspaper use. Blumler and McQuail replicated these findings in their study of the 1964 British General Election with almost identical correlations. They also examined the contributions of television news, which they found to be low and statistically nonsignificant.

These two studies portray election television as a major source of the public's information about British party politics, but it is the party program that accounts for most of the variance. The British party program is longer and more issue-oriented than is the typical political presentation on American television. Because of the shorter British campaign and the relatively limited access of British politicians to television, the British party program probably stimulates more interest

and, thus, more learning than might the seemingly endless coverage, commercials, and specials that characterize American campaign television. The party program then is a nonroutine media event, specifically focused on issues. In the context of another such nonroutine event, the Great Debates of 1960, Carter (1962) reported significant learning of issue positions, and McLeod, Bybee, Durall and Ziemke (1977) report that the 1976 debates also increased accuracy.

But it is significant that the British investigators found little relationship between routine exposure to television news and accuracy. This finding has been replicated during an American presidential campaign by McClure and Patterson (1974), who conducted a longitudinal survey and content analysis in 1972. The survey shows that while newspaper readership made a substantial contribution to accuracy, television news made almost no contribution. Respondents gained more information from viewing political advertisements than they did from television news. The content analysis provides an explanation: the three television networks did not provide significant coverage of the candidates' stands on the major issues of the campaign. As a network average, only 3% of the available news minutes were devoted to reporting the candidates' stands on the issues. This breaks down to only a minute or two per candidate per issue.

This paucity of coverage of the issues of the 1972 presidential campaign may not be an isolated phenomena but rather the necessary consequence of the economic system that governs network programming. Economic constraints have locked network news into an inflexible 30-minute format, imposing a ceiling on the amount of information that can be transmitted. This ceiling is substantially lower than it is for the

print media.

When we consider other news that competes with issue coverage for these scarce air-minutes, the problem is compounded by the exigencies of the ratings game. According to Epstein (1973), network news divisions are expected to maintain--or at least not significantly diminish--their network's "audience flow." While network executives do not believe that network news can attract large numbers of new viewers to a channel, no matter how high the quality of coverage, they do believe that "visually unsatisfactory" news can cause a significant number of viewers to change channels. Since a drop in the news audience can seriously affect ratings for the whole prime-time schedule, the news organization operates under a constraint to present the news in the most visually satisfactory form, no matter how complex the subject matter. Since the presentation of candidates' stands on the issues seldom lends itself to striking visuals, issues are often neglected in favor of more photogenic campaign pagentry.

Thus, it appears that television news may be a poor choice for the voter who wishes to gain the information necessary to exercise the vote intelligently.

Cognitive and Motivational Preparation

Cognitive Factors: One of the more consistent research findings is that general political knowledge, especially knowledge of the political system, is not equally distributed among the various segments of the electorate. Education is a strong predictor of general political knowledge, and a substantial body of research literature converges to suggest that the well-educated are most likely to use the media to become well-informed (Robinson, 1972).

To the extent that this general pattern holds for accuracy as well as for general political knowledge, the vote is a more precise instrument in the hands of the well-educated than it is in the hands of the less well-educated.

In America, one of the foremost traditional obligations of the mass media has been to democratize knowledge. But a group of University of Minnesota researchers (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1973; Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien, 1975) suggest that an infusion of mass-mediated information into a social system actually increases the gap in knowledge between educational elites and nonelites. Their general hypothesis holds that as the flow of mass-mediated information into a social system increases, higher status individuals acquire this information at a faster rate than do lower status individuals.

This is a system-level hypothesis and, thus, has been studied exclusively at the community level. Within this context, findings have tended to support the hypothesis, but there are three important limitations that affect their generalizability to the process by which the individual becomes an informed voter during a presidential campaign.

First, the findings are limited to newspapers. The authors explain these findings as a result of a print system oriented toward higher status groups. That is, newspapers are said to present knowledge of an event (which would include the sort of knowledge needed for interpretation). Because educational elites are more likely to have acquired knowledge about events in other contexts, they are thought to be better able to make sense of events as they are presented by newspapers.

Second, whether an infusion of information into a community via the newspaper increases the knowledge gap appears to depend upon the degree

of conflict surrounding the issue. For example, Tichenor, Rodenkirchen, Olien, and Donohue (1973) have found that the knowledge gap decreased with increased coverage when citizens perceived conflict about the issue involved. This finding suggests that conflict can stimulate nonelites to utilize mass-mediated information more effectively, and the American presidential campaign is a time when the lines of political conflict are most clearly drawn.

The third limitation is inherent in attempting to apply a social-system hypothesis and the research it has generated to a problem conveived here at the individual level. The hypothesis holds that an infusion of information into a social system will produce an increase in the knowledge gap between elites and nonelites. But because it is formulated at the social-system level, the hypothesis does not specify the individual-level processes by which this is expected to occur.

One could speculate, as the authors do, that nonelite individuals are not as well equipped to make sense of newspaper coverage as are elites.

The implicit assumption is that education prepares the person for media use by providing a body of contextual knowledge about the political system that allows the person to process new information more effectively. Yet knowledge of the political system is available to the public through a variety of nonacademic channels, particularly the mass media. Large-scale studies by Robinson (1967, 1972) indicate that while education is a powerful predictor of system knowledge, differences in knowledge between persons of different educational levels are small among the heavier media users, suggesting that extensive attention to the mass media can act to level educational differences in system knowledge.

Thus, it seems appropriate to differentiate empirically between

education and knowledge of the political system. This allows us to assess the degree to which system knowledge is a by-product of both education and mass media use. It also allows us to estimate the degree to which such knowledge appears to facilitiate the acquisition of accurate perceptions of the presidential candidates.

Motivational Factors: Interest is a summary concept that incorporates the uses and gratifications a person might expect from attention. We are concerned here with two types of interest: (1) general interest in day-to-day political affairs, or political interest, and (2) interest in the immediate situation, campaign interest.

The knowledge gap research might be partially explained by the difference between these two types of interest. The better-educated tend to be more interested than the lesser-educated in the day-to-day affairs of government simply because they tend to occupy roles and form social liasons in which such information is useful. Thus, as a routine matter, they are likely to follow such information in the mass media more closely than those lesser-educated individuals to whom it is not so relevant.

But when an issue generates conflict, normally-passive segments of the community may become involved. The better-educated then lose part of their usual advantage based on their day-to-day political interest, and the knowledge gap decreases.

Thus, one would expect general political interest to be associated with media use and knowledge of the political system, but in the conflict-laden arena of a presidential campaign, its association with accuracy would be expected to be less than it might be under more routine conditions.

Berelson et al. (1954) found that campaign interest followed closely

behind communication exposure and education as a predictor of accuracy, with 51% of those high in accuracy reporting "great" interest. Blumler and McQuail (1969) reported that strength of motivation to follow the campaign affected exposure to party programs but mediated the relationship between media exposure and information gain only at the highest levels of exposure. McLeod and Becker (1974) found evidence for the idea that gratifications and media exposure make additive contributions to accuracy.

Thus, it appears that campaign interest contributes to both media exposure and accuracy. There is no reason to expect it to contribute to knowledge of the political system.

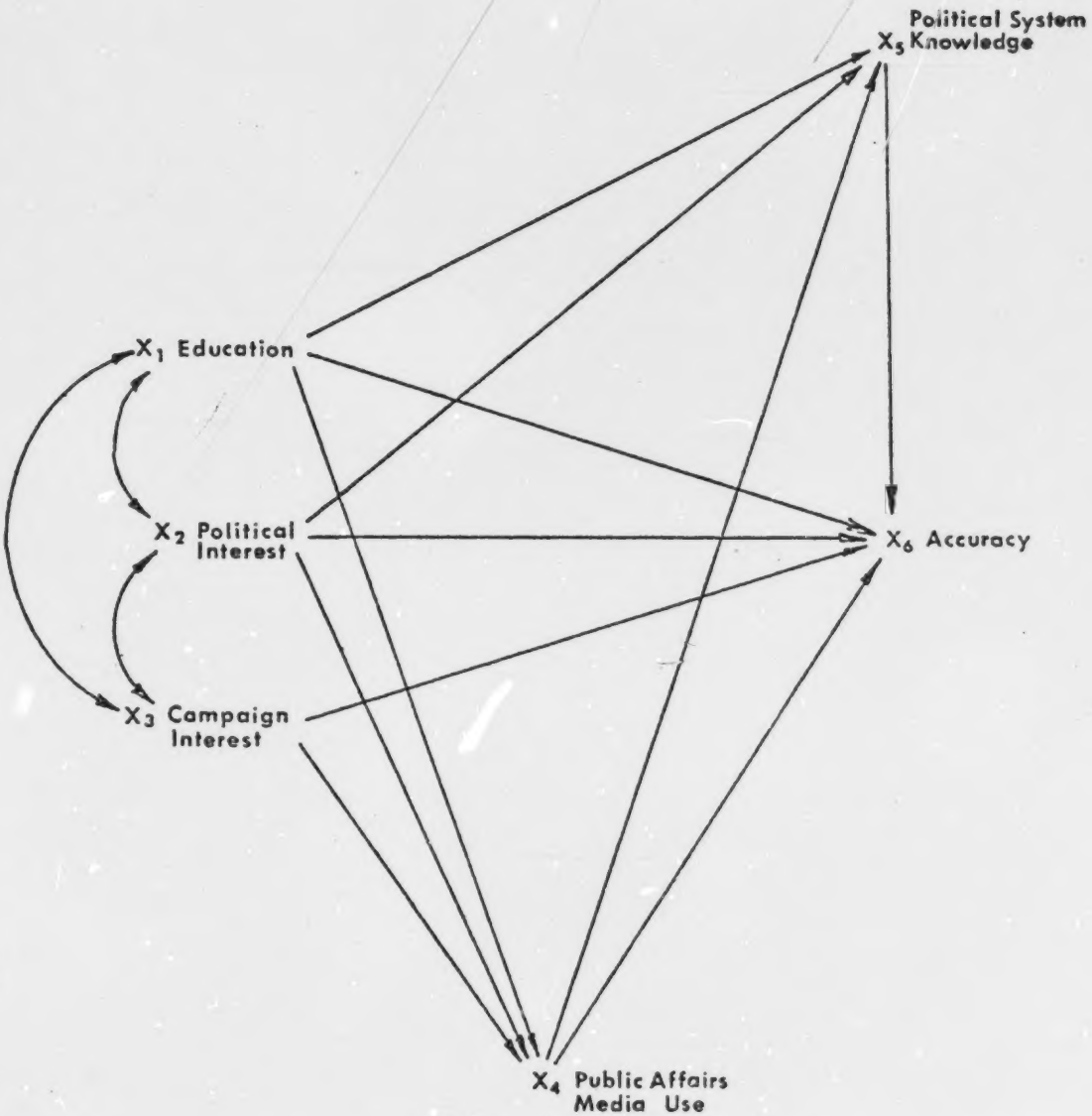
A CAUSAL MODEL

The research literature suggests that the means by which individuals acquire accurate perceptions of presidential candidates' issue stands is a complex process involving (1) attention to the mass media and (2) cognitive and motivational preparation variables that impinge <u>both</u> on media use and on accuracy.

The following model depicts the hypothesized causal structure among the main variables thought to be instrumental in producing accuracy.

Figure 1

A Causal Model of the Accuracy-Acquisition Process



NOTE: Each solid line with a single-headed arrow represents a positive causal relationship. A double-headed curved arrow indicates an unanalyzed correlation between pre-determined or exogenous variables.

DISCUSSION OF THE MODEL

The exogenous variable--education, political interest, and campaign interest--represent types of cognitive and motivational preparation thought to be necessary for acquiring accuracy. They are arrayed in a hierarchy according to the time necessary for their acquisition. Education requires considerable investment in terms of time, money, and energy. Political interest is considered a relatively stable characteristic developed over time while campaign interest can be nothing more than a fleeting response to campaign stimuli.

The inclusion of these three types of presumed requisites represents a synthesis of two traditional viewpoints of the citizen's flexibility and potential for successful intervention in the electoral process and the mass media's capacity for diffusing broadly the information needed for successful intervention. I will refer to these viewpoints as the minimalist and maximalist positions.

The maximalist position is implicit in early libertarian democratic thought and in its journalistic analogue, the Libertarian Theory of the Press. The best-known early proponents of this view are the English Enlightenment philosopher Locke and the American philosopher-statesman Jefferson. Both were unequivocal in their assessment of "Man" as free, equal, and rational and of the government as of no more than a convenient instrument to preserve order and individual rights. Since the government was thought to exist only for the sake of the individual, it had no right to govern without the individual's consent. Locke was more stringent on his point than was Jefferson, but both interpret the consent power broadly.

From this stance, it requires only a small logical step to see that the right to consent is useless without meaningful information.

It was thought that the extension of the franchise without the extension of information to franchised nonelites not only would subvert the essential purposes of libertarian democracy but also would open nonelites to manipulation and exploitation, lower the quality of electoral decision-making, and possibly, throw the entire system into jeopardy.

Madison put it this way:

> Nothing could be more irrational than to give the people power, and to withhold from them information without which power is abused. A people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with power which knowledge gives. A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or tragedy, or perhaps both.
>
> (Austin, 1964, p. 55)

At the time of the ratification of the Constitution, the libertarians fought bitterly for a constitutional guarantee of a free press which they assumed would fulfull this obligation to the political system.

This faith in the media to elevate the electoral process is grounded in four assumptions: (1) that a press free of government control results in ideological diversity, (2) that given the availability of competing viewpoints in the media, citizens will expose themselves to them, (3) that, given exposure, citizens will perceive these viewpoints clearly and objectively, without subjective distortion, and (4) that since the capacity for active, rational citizenship is viewed as a core human tendency rather than as a socially differentiated trait, information flow via the media will result in the democratization of knowledge. That is, the flow of information will not be constrained significantly by social inequities but rather will provide equivalent enlightenment to all sectors of society (Lasswell, 1948).

Conversely, the minimalist view questions the idea that mass-mediated information will necessarily broaden the distribution of knowledge among the electorate. This position constitutes an extension of the limited effects model, which is usually applied to persuasive effects. The limited effects model grew out of early field studies which failed to document conversion effects attributable to the mass media (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson at al., 1954) and was reinforced by the development of consistency theories, such as Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which provided a rationale for the media's apparent inability to convert. According to dissonance theory, individuals seek to appear consistent to themselves. Thus, they perceptually shield themselves from messages that are incongruent with their prior dispositions or behavior through the mechanisms of selective perception, and selective retention. Festinger's position of these nonrational processes directly opposes the maximalist assumptions that citizens will both expose themselves to competing viewpoints in the media and perceive these viewpoints clearly and objectively.

The law of minimal consequences and its underlying theoretical rationale most often has been invoked by such writers as Klapper (1960) to explain why the media more often appear to reinforce than to change social predispositions which affect attitudes and behavior, but the idea has been applied to informational media effects as well. In this case, social inequities are presumed to act as constraints to the free flow of information and the equivalent enlightenment of all sectors of the society and, thus, confronts the maximalist assumption that the transmission of information via the mass media will result in a democratization of knowledge.

In his 1972 review of literature on information diffusion, Robinson summarizes this viewpoint:

> . . . like almost every other institution in society, abundant evidence suggests that the mass media tend to reinforce and accenturate existing conditions rather than promote egalitarianism or abrupt change.
>
> (Robinson, 1972, p. 87)

The minimalist viewpoint then implies that the citizens potential as a political actor is severely restricted by social predispositions. The individual is seen as relatively static--fixed within a distribution of political knowledge that defines the person's potential for successful intervention in the electoral process. In order to move from one point to another in the distribution the person must go through a period of cognitive and motivational preparation.

In terms of the model, education is the most important element in the minimalist scheme, followed by a stable, day-to-day interest in politics, both of which connote a period of preparation for the campaign. Campaign interest, as an isolated response to campaign--independent of education or a stable interest in politics--would not be considered sufficient preparation for successful intervention.

The importance of education stems from its presumed ability to produce knowledge of the political system, or a context to help the person retain and understand new political information. Similarly, day-to-day interest in political affairs would be expected to produce system knowledge. The model makes these assumptions explicit in the paths from education and political interest through political system knowledge to accuracy. It also introduces another possibility--that attention to public affairs media also contributes to political system knowledge.

The minimalist position would accomodate also the idea that education leads to media exposure, which is, in turn, associated with accuracy. But it is education and not media exposure that is considered the causal factor, with media use acting as a reinforcer. The indirect path from education through media use to accuracy allows us to assess the extent to which media use reinforces education.

The maximalist position is most concerned with independent contributions of media use. If informing the electorate is the primary obligation of the media in a participant society and if the media are to inform all sectors of that society equally, then the contribution of media use to accuracy, independent of factors reflecting social inequities, is a rough measure of the degree to which the media are meeting their democratic obligations. Because of this interest in direct effects, interest in the immediate campaign is the only receiver requisite relevant to the maximalist position.

In the model, campaign interest is assumed to be causally prior to media use. This is consistent with Blumler and McQuail's (1969) finding that strength of motivation for following British election television affected exposure to the television campaign but that regular television use did not appear to affect motivation to follow the campaign. The effects of newspaper use were not examined. In a longitudinal study of American adolescents, Chaffee, Ward, and Tipton (1970) did find a weak effect of public affairs newspaper readership upon later campaign activity, but public affairs television viewing appears to retard activity. McLeod et at. (1977) were able to show a positive association between viewing of the 1976 presidential debates and heightened interest in the campaign. However, this association disappeared when other debate variables were introduced as controls. Thus,

while campaign interest does appear to stimulate media use during the campaign, the evidence for the reverse pattern appears to be weak and limited to print media use.

Positioning campaign interest as causally prior to media use also allows us to assess the degree to which the indirect path from campaign interest through media use accounts for variation in accuracy. This type of systematic linkage between gratifications and effects has been probed by such researchers as Blumler and McQuail (1969) and McLeod and Becker (1974). In both studies, gratifications sought contribute to the informational effects of mass media use.

The idea that campaign interest works through media exposure is implicit to the maximalist rationale, which holds that the individual is a flexible and rational political actor with the potential to intercede intelligently in the electoral process at any point in time. Such intercession requires only an interest in the immediate situation. The model makes this assumption explicit.

Although the maximalist might concede that the better-educated tend to use public affairs media more than do the lesser-educated, media use, not education, is seen as the causal variable. Thus, the indirect path through media use would add substantially to the variance accounted for by education alone.

The maximalist then would attribute individual differences in knowledge to patterns of media use and to the informational characteristics of the media, while the minimalist would attribute these differences to socially-determined receiver characteristics.

EXPECTATIONS

It is likely that both of these viewpoints have some empirical validity.

The purpose of this paper is to discover (1) the extent to which each view appears to describe the process by which voters acquire accurate perceptions in the high-political salience, conflict-laden arena of an American presidential campaign and (2) the conditions under which each seems most appropriate. Two conditions which will be examined here are (1) different media and (2) the person's experience as a voter.

Media Difference

As noted earlier, two studies, one American (McClure and Patterson, 1974), one British (Blumler and McQuail, 1969) have found television news viewing unrelated to accuracy. McClure and Patterson also examined news content and found a dearth of issue coverage on network news.

However, they did find that substantial gains in accuracy were related to newspaper readership, as did Berelson et al. (1954) in their pre-television study.

Thus, the path from public affairs newspaper readership to accuracy is expected to be strong while the path from television news is expected to be nonsignificant.

Experienced vs. Inexperienced Voters

We know that patterns of media attention vary during the adult life cycle (Chaffee and Wilson, 1975). Young adults, for example, tend to read the newspaper less frequently than do older adults. And when they do read a newspaper, they are more likely to read it for some specific reason than out of the force of sheer habit (Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, Inc., 1976).

The effects of media attention may also differ. A study by Chaffee, Jackson-Beeck, Lewin, and Wilson (forthcoming) shows that attention to television news produces knowledge of the political system in adolescence

but not in young adulthood.

The process by which political information is acquired may differ also. For example, Bybee and Lomitti (1976) found that perceived similarity of political attitudes has a direct effect on frequency of discussion for older, but not for younger, voters. This suggests that the young are less congealed and less constricted in their patterns of information-seeking than are their elders.

The young are relatively unfixed in the social structure. They normally have more heterogenous social contacts than do their elders, and are less likely to be committed to a political party. As first-time voters, they may well be the more open to new information than those who have experienced many campaigns.

Thus, those under 25, the new young voter of 1972, may well fit the maximalist position better than the older experienced voter. If so, efforts by the media to reach the young voter are well-advised.

THE PATH ANALYTIC APPROACH

Path analysis, as described by Duncan (1975) permits the researcher to express a complex system of relationships in relatively simple mathematical terms and to test these relationships both individually and as a system. It also allows the researcher to explore indirect effects, or causal sequences, rather than forcing the analysis of variables as competing sources of variance. However, the validity of the inferences drawn from path analysis depend on the researcher's ability to order the variables correctly within the model. The procedure cannot establish time order.

In path analysis, the relationships posited in the causal model are expressed in terms of simultaneous regression equations. Standardized regression (path) coefficients are estimated using a least-squares procedure.

The model tested here is recursive, in that there are no instances of two-way causality.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES IN THE CAUSAL MODEL

Exogenous Variables

X_1 --Education--Measured by number of years of formal education

X_2 --Political Interest--Political interest connotes a reasonably stable, day-to-day interest in poltics. Respondents were asked, "Generally, would you say you are very interested in politics, interested in politics, indifferent, disinterested in politics, or very disinterested in politics?"

X_3 --Campaign Interest--Interest in the presidential campaign of 1972. Respondents were asked how interested they were in "this campaign." The response set was the same as for political interest.

Endogenous Variables

X_4 --Public Affairs Mass Media Use--Three measures were obtained, reflecting (1) attention to public affairs information in the newspaper, (2) regular readership of public affairs magazines, such as Time and Newsweek, and frequency of viewing network news.

Public Affairs Newspaper Readership--Respondents were asked: "When you read your paper and come across stories about national government and politics, how often do you read them? Would you say you frequently, sometimes, rarely, or never read stories about national government and politics?"

Public Affairs Magazine Use--Respondents were asked: "Do you read any magazines regularly here in the home? (If yes) Would you name the magazines you read most regularly?" Respondents were scored according to the number of public affairs magazines named. (Magazines considered

Public Affairs Magazines are listed in Appendix A.)

Network News Viewing--Respondents were asked: "Do you watch national news broadcasts frequently, sometimes, rarely, or never?"

X_5 --Knowledge of the Political System--This variable reflects the extent of contextual knowledge of the political system. Respondents were asked to name the two United States senators from Wisconsin; the length of terms of office for senators, United States representatives, and the Wisconsin governor; and to identify the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1964.

X_6 --Accuracy--Accuracy represents the degree to which respondents were able correctly to identify the major-party candidates' publicly-stated positions on the major issues of the 1972 presidential campaign.

Respondents were given a card listing 10 definite positions on 10 major issues discussed by the candidates during the 1972 campaign. The list included such statements as "we should pass a federal law legalizing abortion in every state" and "there should be a moratorium on the bussing of school children to achieve integration." (For a complete list of these issues, see Appendix A.) The interviewer then asked the respondent whether each of the major candidates had taken a stand for or against (the issue statement). Respondents were scored according to the number of correct responses given.

DATA COLLECTION

Personal interviews were conducted with 388 eligible voters in Madison, Wisconsin and 129 eligible voters in Lexington, Kentucky during October, 1972.

The Madison data set was collected as part of a larger research program in Britain and the United States, which was concerned with

differences between first-time and older voters. Thus, persons eligible to vote for the first time in 1972 (18- to 24-year-olds) were deliberately oversampled to provide approximately equal numbers of first-time and older voters. In this analysis, as in other studies based on this research program (Note 1), these age groups will be treated as if they were two separate samples.

The sample was drawn from occupants of randomly-selected households in randomly-selected neighborhoods. Student wards were deliberately undersampled to offset the effects of the presence of the University of Wisconsin.

The Lexington sample consisted entirely of first-time voters, randomly-selected from seniors listed in high school yearbooks of all Lexington high schools over a four-year period and from administration lists of registeted students at the University of Kentucky. The Lexington high school's sample yielded 82 completed interviews, while the University of Kentucky sample yielded 47 completed interviews. (Note 2)

RESULTS

As Table 1 indicates, young and older Madison voters are equally accurate, with both identifying correctly an average of 11 of 20 possible issue positions. There also is no significant difference in mean political system knowledge between the two samples. Table 2 shows that Lexington young voters do not differ significantly from the Madison sample in terms of either accuracy or political system knowledge.

This similarity of informational outcomes might be thought surprising considering the higher educational level of the older sample ($p < .001$). Older voters also appear to pay more attention to all forms of public affairs media than do the younger group, although the difference is statistically

Table 1

Comparison of Means for Variables in the Causal Model for Young and Older Samples: Madison, Wisconsin

Variable	Madison Young Sample	Madison Older Sample	p*
Accuracy	11.00	11.01	n.s.
Education	6.51	7.83	<.001
Political Interest	3.75	3.88	n.s.
Campaign Interest	2.97	2.93	n.s.
Political System Knowledge	3.88	3.94	n.s.
Public Affairs Newspaper Use	3.39	3.61	<.01
Public Affairs Magazine Use	.77	.84	n.s.
Network News Viewing	3.30	3.43	n.s.
	n=216	n=162	

*t-test for independent samples, two-tailed test.

Table 2

Comparison of Means for Variables in the Causal Model for Young Voter Samples in Madison, Wisconsin and Lexington, Kentucky

Variable	Madison Sample	Lexington Sample	p*
Accuracy	11.00	10.24	n.s.
Education	13.51**	13.45	n.s.
Political Interest	3.75	3.84	n.s.
Campaign Interest	2.97	4.12	<.001
Political System Knowledge	3.88	3.52	n.s.
Public Affairs Newspaper Use	3.39	3.35	n.s.
Public Affairs Magazine Use	.77	.72	n.s.
Network News Viewing	3.30	3.13	n.s.
	n=216	n=129	

*t-test for independent samples, two-tailed test

**Different scaling procedures were used to code education for the Madison and Lexington samples. For this table, the Madison mean has been converted so that it might be comparable to the Lexington mean.

significant only for newspapers ($p < .01$). Lexington young voters are remarkably similar to their Madison counterparts in terms of both education and media behavior. In fact, the only statistically significant difference between the two young voter samples is the Lexington sample's greater self-reported interest in the campaign ($p < .001$).

Thus, young and older voters appear to attain the same degree of accuracy despite differences in variables presumed to affect accuracy. This suggests that the processes by which young and older voters acquire accurate perceptions of political candidates differ.

All three samples are substantially more accurate on issues upon which the presidential candidates disagreed than they are on those upon which the candidates agreed ($p < .001$). (These results are shown in Table 3.) Areas of conflict between presidential candidates are more likely than areas of agreement to arouse voter interest and to receive coverage in the mass media. Thus, it appears that the voter's interest in the campaign and use of public affairs mass media may be important variables in the accuracy-acquisition process. I will explore this process in terms of three media--newspapers, magazines, and television.

The figures that follow depict the results of path analyses carried out for the young and older Madison samples and the young Lexington sample. A solid line with a single-headed arrow represents a statistically-significant relationship. A broken line with a single-headed arrow represents a nonsignificant relationship. Coefficients associated with these lines are standardized beta weights (path coefficients).

A double-headed curved arrow represents an unanalyzed correlation. These correlations are not analyzed because the variables involved are predetermined, or exogenous to the model. We are not concerned here with

Table 3

Comparison of Mean Accuracy for Candidate-Agreement and Candidate Disagreement Issues

	Agreement Issues	Disagreement Issues	p*
Madison Young Sample N=216	.45**	.62	<.001
Madison Older Sample N=162	.43	.61	<.001
Lexington Young Sample	.44	.56	<.001

*t-test for paired samples, two-tailed test

**Scores were divided by the number of issues. Thus, the means reflect the probability that any respondent will identify correctly any specific issue in the appropriate category.

their antecedents.

The criterion for statistical significance was set at the .01 level, and the statistic applied was the F-Ratio. The unstandardized beta weights and their standard errors were also inspected. Generally, the unstandardized beta weight is statistically significant if it is twice its standard error. In nearly all cases, the results of these two methods for ascertaining statistical significance agreed. F-Ratios, unstandardized beta weights or path coefficients, and standard errors for the following analyses are reported in Appendix B.

The Newspaper In The Accuracy-Acquisition Process

Comparison of the Madison Samples

A comparison of Figures 2 and 3 show that, despite lower mean levels of readership, Madison young voters are more affected by newspaper use than are their elders. The direct path from newspaper use to accuracy is a significant .21 in the young sample, while in the older sample, it is a nonsignificant .08. Attention to public affairs material in the newspaper then appears to play a critical role in the accuracy-acquisition process only for young voters. Since young and older voters achieve almost identical levels of accuracy, it appears that older voters have alternate means for acquiring political information.

Figure 2

Path Analysis for Young Madison Sample
Using Newspaper Use as Media Indicator

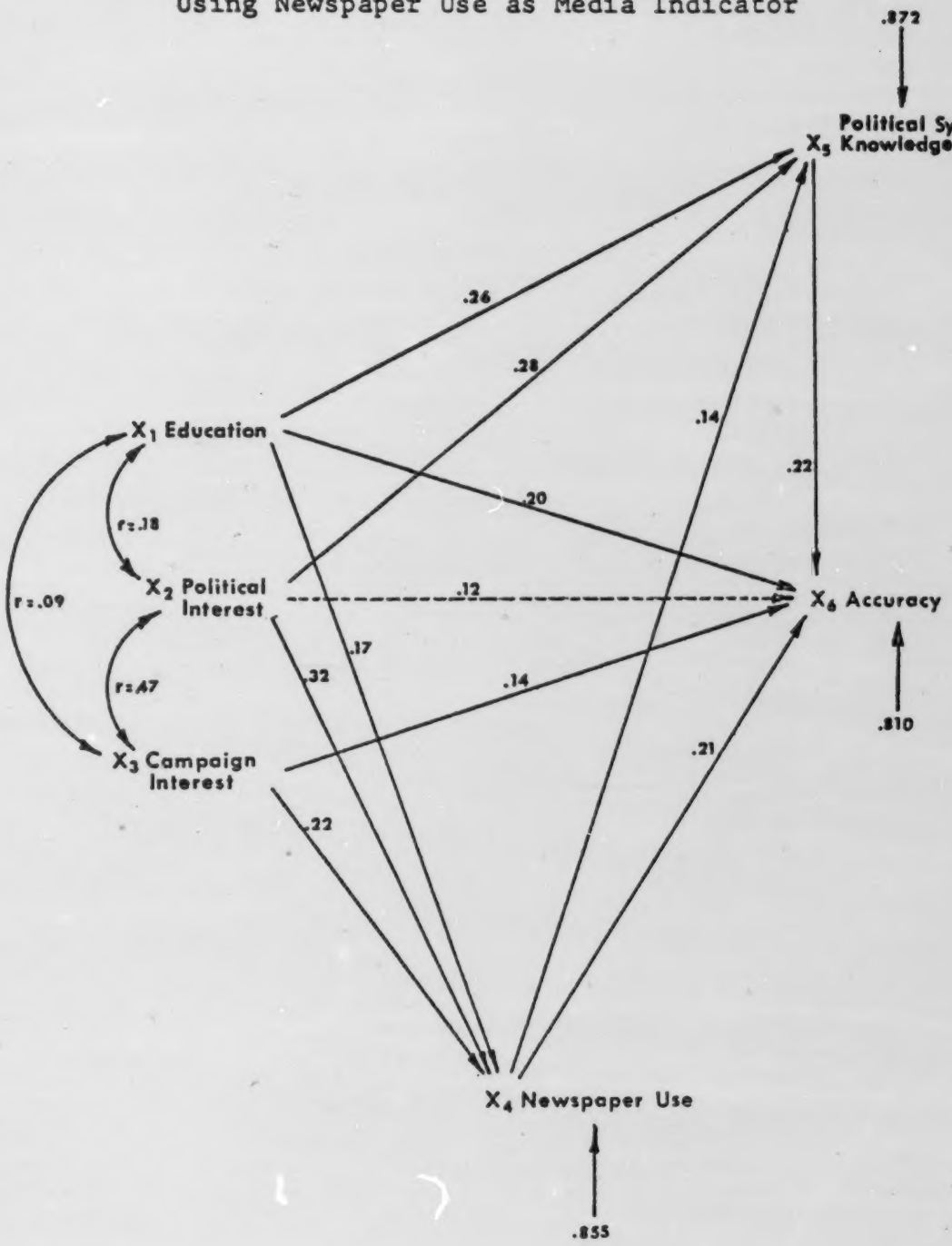
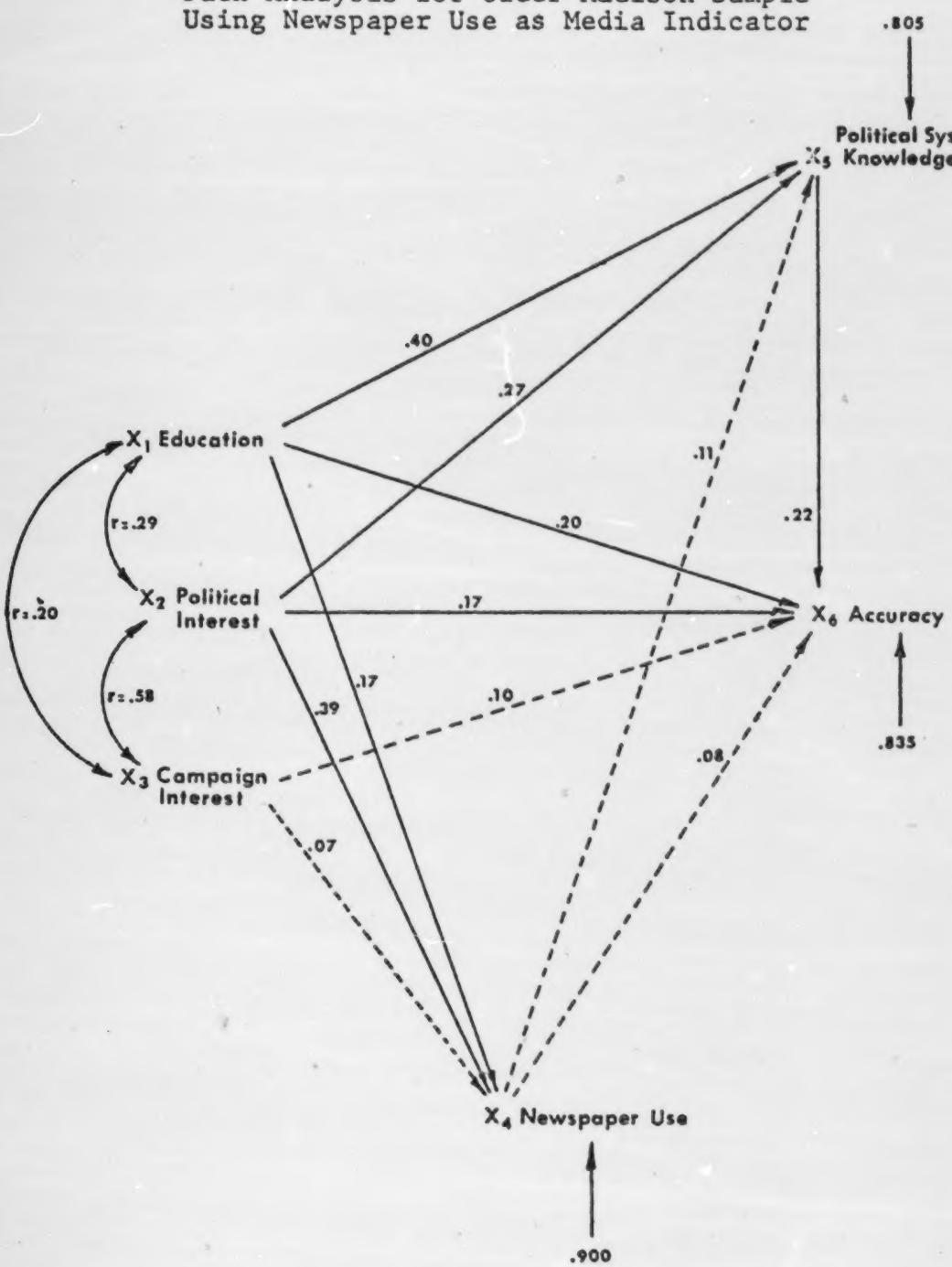


Figure 3

Path Analysis for Older Madison Sample
Using Newspaper Use as Media Indicator



The antecedents of newspaper readership also differ. In both samples, education and political interest are important, and the weights attached to each do not vary greatly between the two samples. However, only for the young is campaign interest a significant predictor (P = .22). In the older sample, the coefficient is almost null (P = .07). This suggests that the young are more flexible in their media habits and more responsive to immediate stimuli, such as a presidential campaign, in their use of the newspaper. It also suggests one possible explanation for the difference in the path from newspaper use to accuracy. Youth are more likely to read the newspaper because they are interested in the campaign. Thus, they learn more about the campaign.

This idea is buttressed by inspection of the indirect path from campaign interest through newspaper use. In the young sample, this indirect path contributes 26% to the total causal covariation between campaign interest and accuracy. In the older sample, the contribution is just 6%. (Note 3)

Indirect paths through newspaper use also add substantially more to the impact of education and political interest among the young. In the young sample, newspaper use contributes 17% of the total causal effect of education. In the older sample, it contributes only 5%. For political interest the contribution is 37% in the young sample, 15% in the older sample.

Thus, whatever the young voter's predisposition, it is more likely to be reinforced by newspaper use than is that of the older voter.

Knowledge of the political system is a strong predictor of accuracy in both samples, lending credence to the "knowledge gap" rationale that such knowledge helps a person to retain and understand new political

information. But its antecedents differ. Newspaper use, for example, makes a significant contribution only in the young sample (P = .14). While political interest makes a nearly identical contribution to system knowledge in both samples, the strength of education varies. The path coefficient for the older sample is .40; in the young sample, it is a smaller, but still substantial .26. These results suggest that system knowledge is somewhat less affected by education, somewhat more affected by media use among young voters than among their elders.

Similarly, the indirect paths from education through system knowledge to accuracy are somewhat stronger for older than for younger voters, accounting for 29% of the total causal covariation in the older sample and 20% in the young sample. However, the indirect path from political interest through system knowledge is greater for the young, accounting for 33% of the total covariation of political interest with accuracy in the young sample, compared with just 26% in the older sample. However, political interest is not a strong independent predictor of accuracy among the young. The path coefficient is a statistically nonsignificant .12, compared with .17 in the older sample.

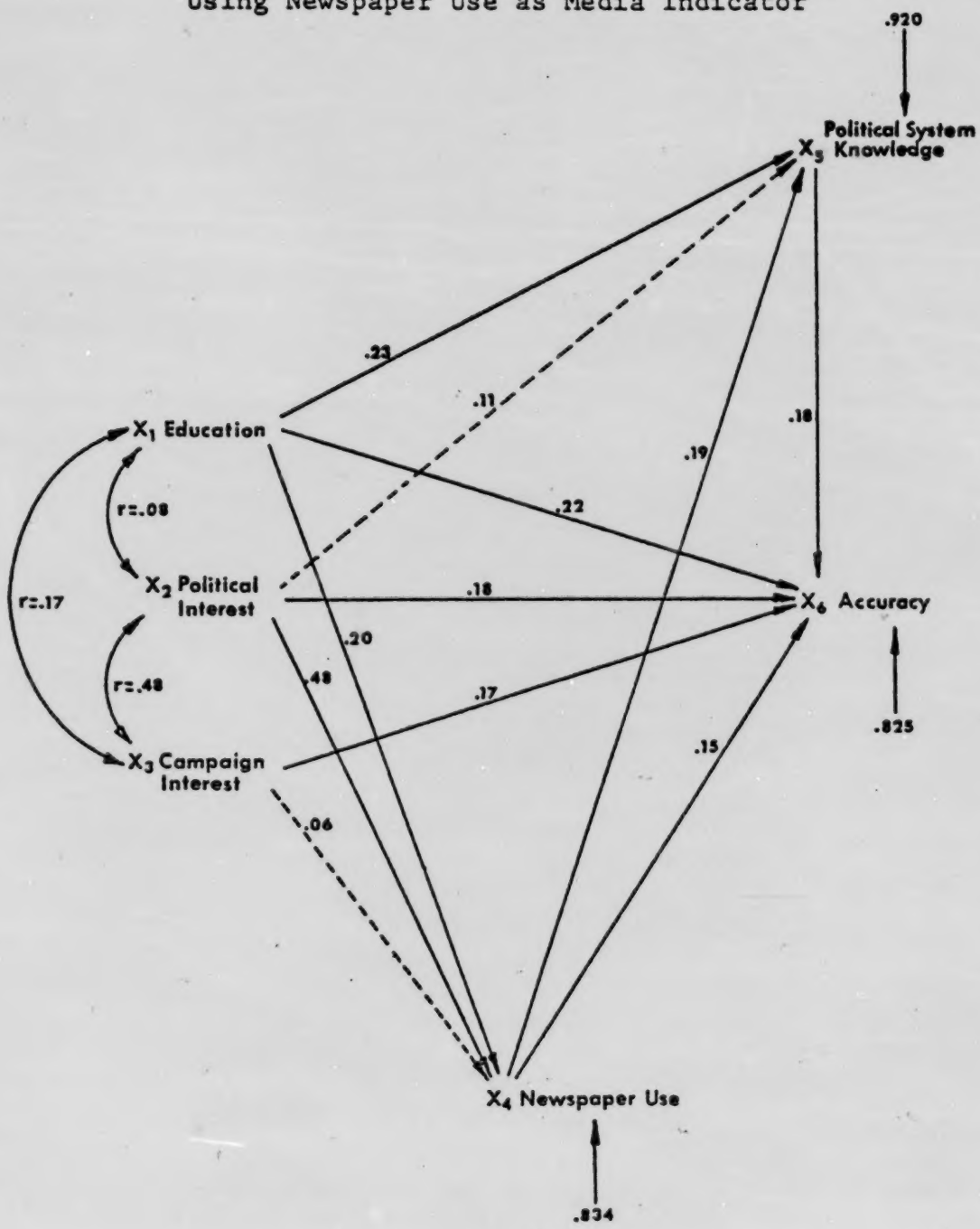
But for neither sample does newspaper readership appear to make much of a contribution to the relationship between education and system knowledge, accounting for just 5% of the total covariation in the older sample and just 7% in the young sample. The contribution to the relationship between political interest and system knowledge is larger, but still modest, accounting for 13% of the total covariation in the older sample and 16% in the younger sample.

The Lexington Sample

Results of the path analysis for young Lexington voters (depicted in figure 4) buttress the idea that first-time voters gain more from public

Figure 4

Path Analysis for Young Lexington Sample
Using Newspaper Use as Media Indicator



affairs newspaper use than do their elders. For both accuracy and political system knowledge, the effects of newspaper use appear to be quite similar to those found for the young Madison sample and dissimilar to those found for the older Madison sample.

The direct paths from newspaper use to both accuracy and political system knowledge are statistically significant for both young samples but not for the Madison older sample. There is, however, a subtle difference between the two young samples. The coefficient for the path from newspaper use to political system knowledge is stronger for the Lexington sample (P = .19) than for the Madison sample (P = .14) while the coefficient for the path from newspaper use to accuracy is stronger for the Madison sample (P = .21) than for the Lexington sample (P = .15).

One possible reason for this difference is suggested by differences in the antecedents of newspaper use between the two young samples. Lexington young voters appear to be motivated to use public affairs information in the newspaper more by a day-to-day interest in political affairs than by a specific interest in the campaign. The coefficient for the path from campaign interest to newspaper use is almost null (P = .06). For the young Madison sample, the coefficient is a substantial .22. Conversely, the coefficient for the path from day-to-day political interest is .48 for the Lexington sample, considerably stronger than that reported for the young Madison sample (P = .32). Thus, variations in information outcomes between the two samples may reflect different patterns of motivation.

The importance of newspaper use to political system knowledge in the Lexington sample is apparent when the indirect path from political interest through newspaper use is inspected. Although the direct path

from political interest to system knowledge is nonsignificant, newspaper use substantially increases the amount of variation that can be explained by the variable. The indirect path through newspaper use accounts for 45% of this total causal covariation. For Madison young voters, the contribution of this indirect path is just 13%.

However, the indirect contribution of newspaper use to the effect of education upon system knowledge is a more modest 14%. For the Madison sample, the contribution is 20%.

Newspaper use contributes substantially to the relationship between political interest and accuracy, with the indirect path accounting for 28% of the total causal covariation. This is consistent with the Madison results, although the contribution for the Madison young voters is 37%.

In both samples, the contribution of newspaper use to the relationship between education and accuracy is modest, accounting for 12% of the total covariation in the Lexington sample and 17% in the Madison sample.

As in the young, but not the older Madison sample, campaign interest makes a significant contribution to accuracy, suggesting that young voters are more stimulated to learn because of interest in the immediate campaign situation. However, inconsistently with the Madison results, newspaper use adds little to the relationship between campaign interest and accuracy, contributing just 6% of the total covariation, as compared with 26% for the Madison sample. This difference is due to the fact that campaign interest was not related significantly to newspaper use for Lexington young voters.

Political system knowledge appears to be a consistent predictor of accuracy. This suggests that such knowledge helps both experienced and inexperienced voters to process new political information. However,

there also appear to be differences between the age groups in the process by which such knowledge is acquired. For example, although education is a significant predictor of political system knowledge in all three samples, its strength appears to be greater for the older Madison sample (P = .40) than for either the young Madison sample (P = .26) or the young Lexington sample (P = .23). This result, along with the previously noted significant contributions of newspaper use to system knowledge in both young samples--but not in the older Madison sample--suggests that young voters are less educationally-fixed in their capabilities for acquiring knowledge about the political system than are their elders and more open to learning through the newspaper.

Public Affairs Magazines In The Accuracy-Acquisition Process

Comparison of the Madison Samples

In contrast to the newspaper, public affairs magazine readership affects accuracy more strongly for older (P = .19) than for young voters (P = .12). (See Figures 5 and 6.)

The indirect paths from education and political interest through magazine use are stronger in the older sample also. In the case of education, the indirect path accounts for 21% of the total covariation for older voters but just 9% for young voters. For political interest, the proportions are 16% and 11%, respectively.

The exogenous variables, taken together, do not predict magazine readership well, accounting for just 13% of the total variance for older voters and 5% for young voters. Obviously, public affairs magazine readership is determined primarily by other factors than those considered here. But of the variables in the model, those that reflect more enduring characteristics predict magazine use best. In the older sample, the only significant path is education (P = .21). In the young sample

Figure 5

Path Analysis for Young Madison Sample
Using Magazine Use as Media Indicator

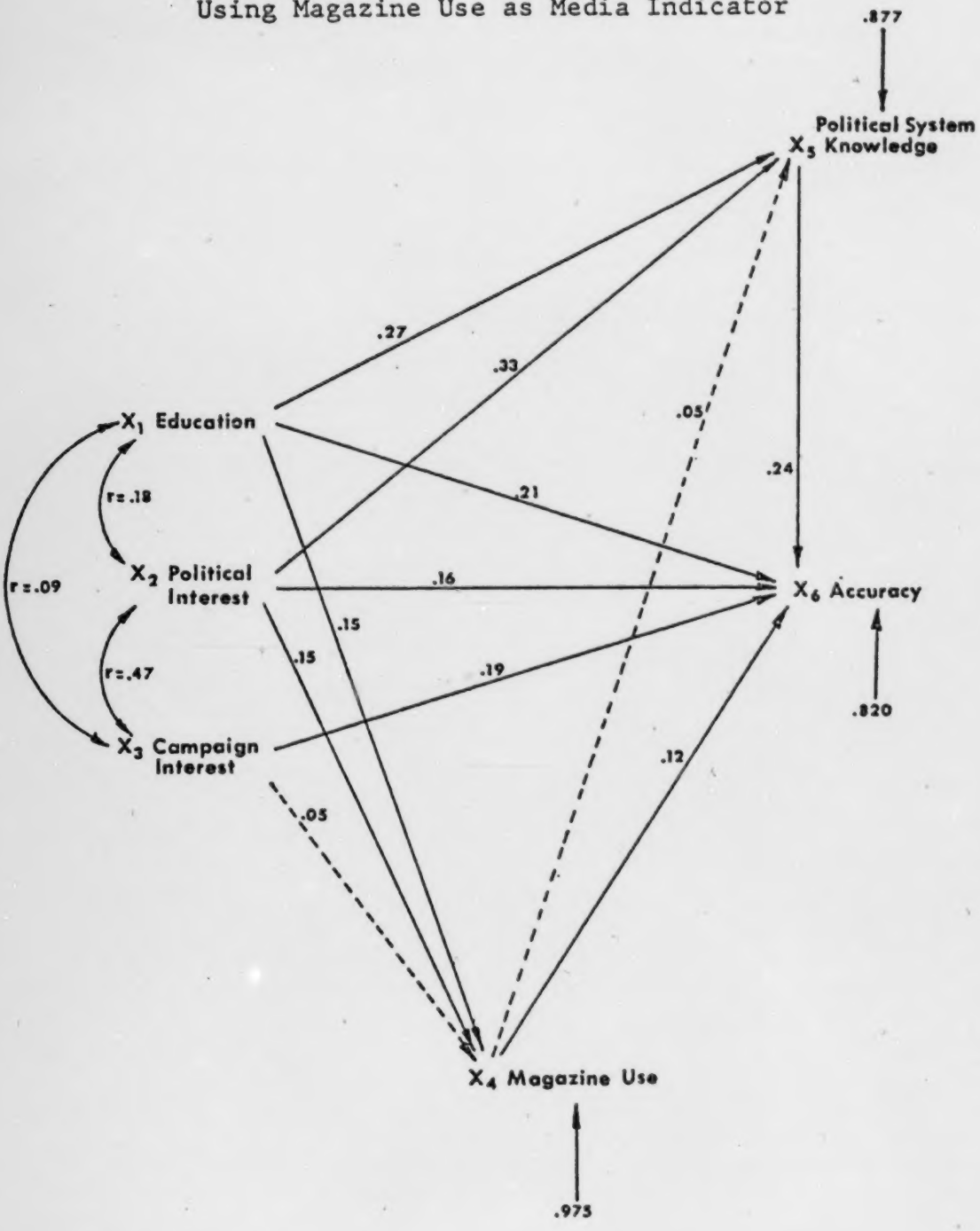
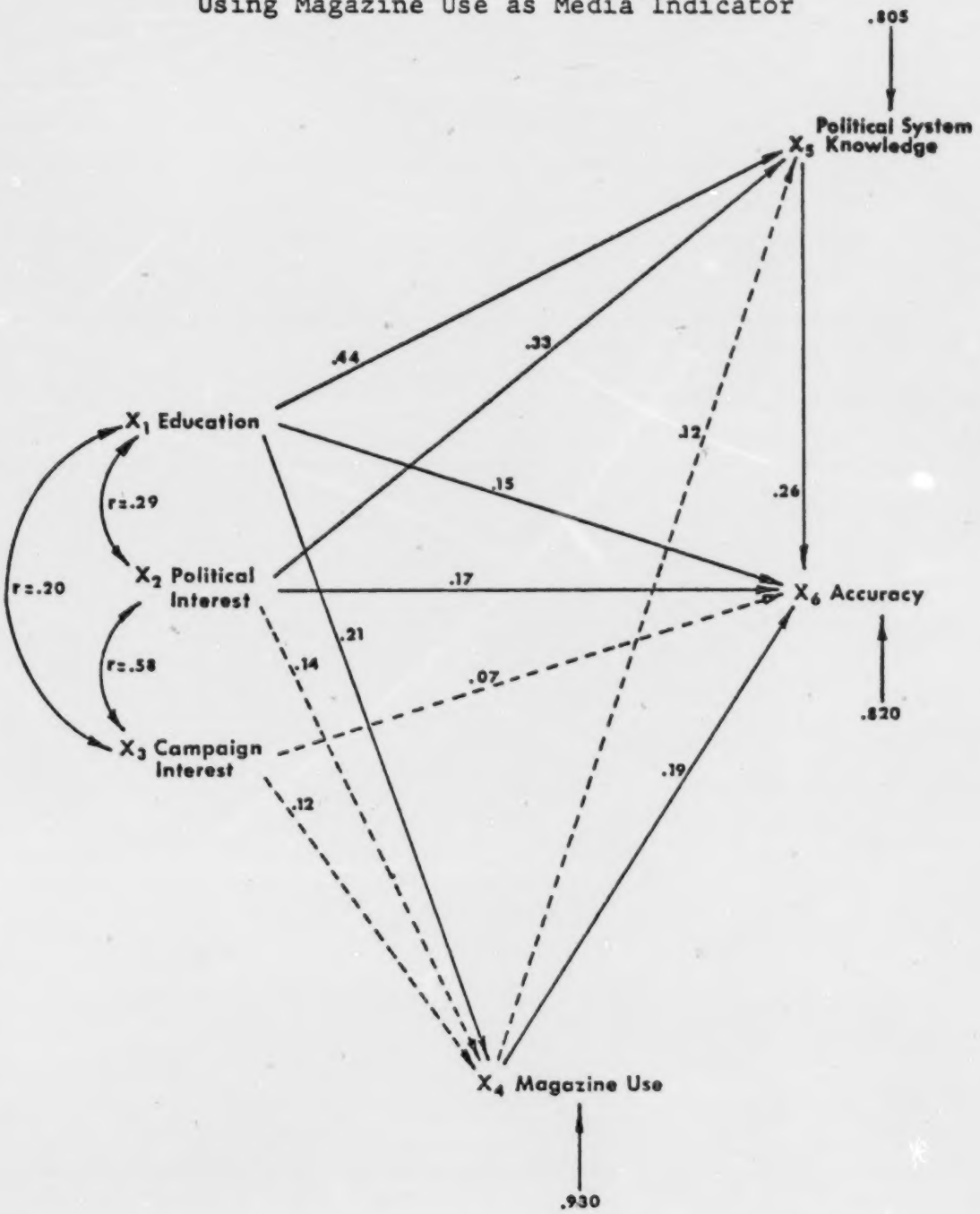


Figure 6

Path Analysis for Older Madison Sample
Using Magazine Use as Media Indicator



both education (P = .15) and political interest (P = .15) are significant.

In neither age group does knowledge of the political system appear to be a by-product of magazine use. The path from magazine use to system knowledge is actually negative for older voters, although the coefficient is not statistically significant.

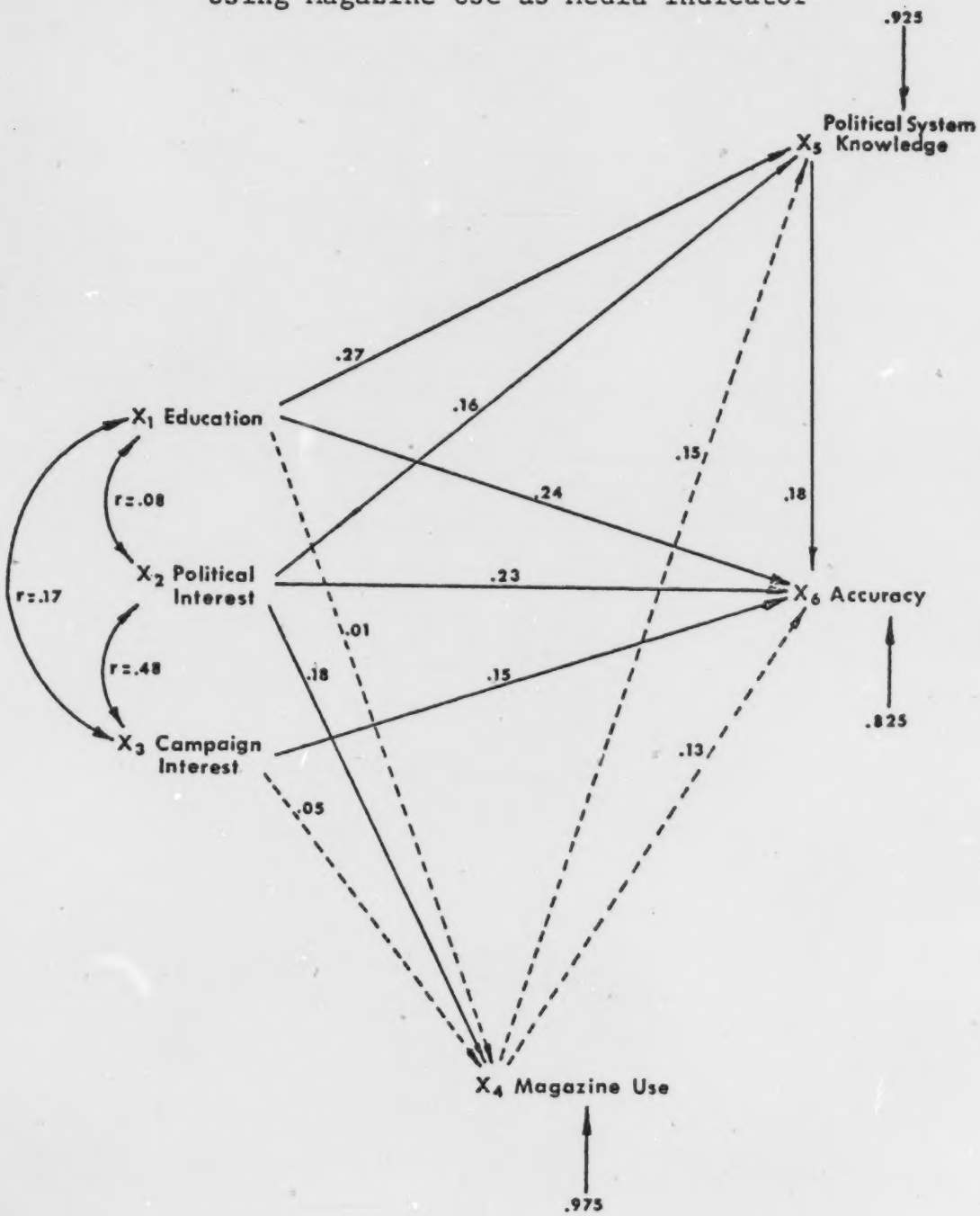
This may be due to the nature of the measure of political system knowledge. The questions dealt with fairly elementary items of political knowledge, such as the length of terms of office for political offices. Editors of public affairs magazines may assume their readers know these facts. Half of the items dealt with Wisconsin state government, which is normally not covered by national public affairs magazines. Thus, to the extent that individuals substitute public affairs magazines for daily newspaper readership, they may miss information about state and local government.

The Lexington Sample

The coefficient for the direct path from public affairs magazine use to accuracy (P = .13) for the young Lexington sample is almost identical to that obtained for the young Madison sample (P = .12), but because of the smaller size of the Lexington sample, it is not significant at the .01 level. (These results are depicted in Figure 7.) Another investigator might choose a less conservative criterion for statistical significance, but whether or not the coefficient is considered significant, it does appear to be consistent with the Madison sample finding that public affairs magazine use contributes less to accuracy for young voters than for older voters. Again, the exogenous variables do not predict magazine use well. Here, only day-to-day political interest appears to make any contribution, and this path is not significant at the .01 level.

Figure 7

Path Analysis for Young Lexington Sample
Using Magazine Use as Media Indicator



It appears, however, that magazine use makes a minor contribution (P = .15) to political system knowledge in the Lexington sample although, again, the coefficient is not significant at the .01 level. However, this finding is inconsistent with the Madison results which indicate that magazine use has no effect on system knowledge for either young or older voters.

Network News In The Accuracy-Acquisition Process

Comparison of the Madison Samples

Network news viewing appears to have no effect on accuracy for either young or older voters (see Figures 8 and 9). This finding was expected and replicates studies conducted in Britain (Blumler and McQuail, 1969) and in America McClure and Patterson (1974).

This null effect cannot be explained in terms of the antecedent conditions of network news viewing. An examination of Figures 6 and 7 shows that these conditions are entirely different for young and older voters. For young voters, political interest (P = .38) and, to a lesser extent, education (P = .13) are related to network news viewing, but the impact of campaign interest is not only nonsignificant, but negative. Conversely, among older voters, campaign interest does appear to affect network news viewing (P = .18), but both education and political interest carry negative weights.

While the antecedent conditions of network news viewing are completely different for the two samples, the result is the same. Neither group appears to learn about the candidates and issues via network news.

Among older voters, network news viewing does appear to make a minor contribution (P = .12) to political system knowledge, but no such relationship is evident among young voters. But even this small contribution is ironic since older voters are motivated by interest in the campaign.

Figure 8

Path Analysis for Young Madison Sample
Using Network News Viewing as
Media Indicator

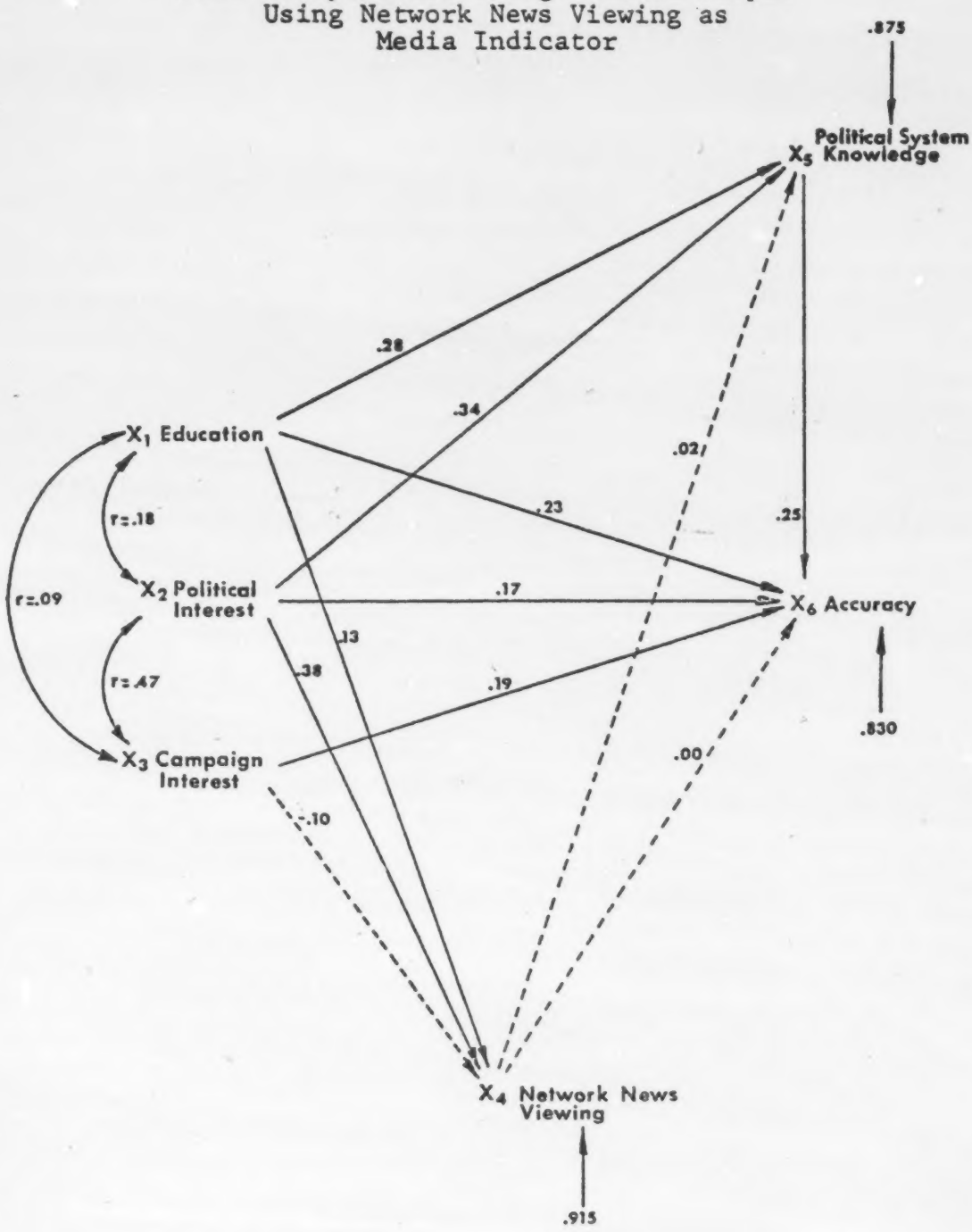
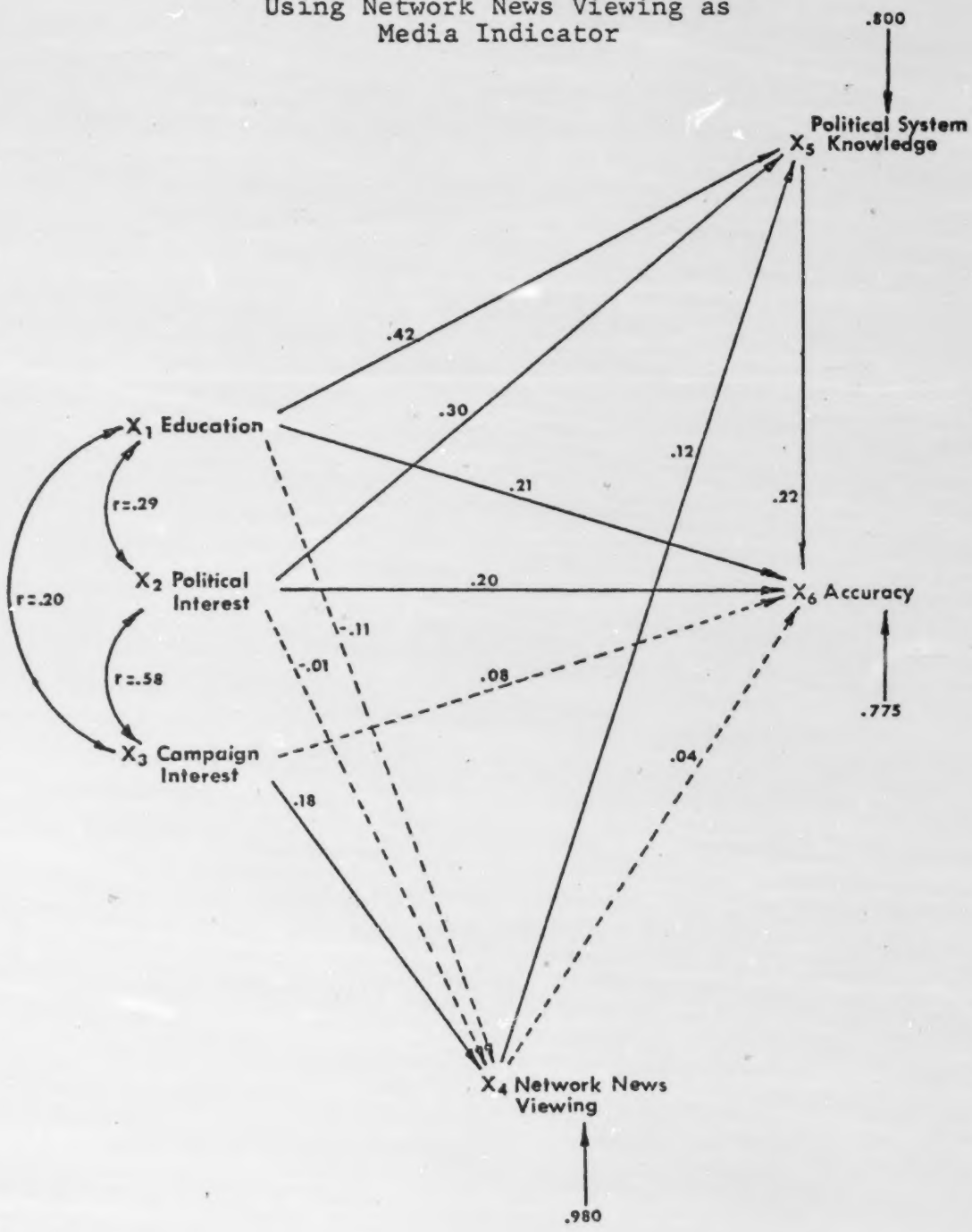


Figure 9

Path Analysis for Older Madison Sample
Using Network News Viewing as
Media Indicator



rather than by an enduring interest in the day-to-day workings of the political system. It would appear that whatever learning occurs is the result of cumulative exposure rather than purposeful information-seeking and that the difference between the young and older samples stems from the older voter's longer experience with the medium and greater opportunity to accumulate system knowledge.

The Lexington Sample

The Lexington results further strengthen the idea that network news viewing makes no contribution to accuracy. As in both Madison samples, the direct path from network news viewing to accuracy is null. (P = .02). (These results are shown in Figure 10.)

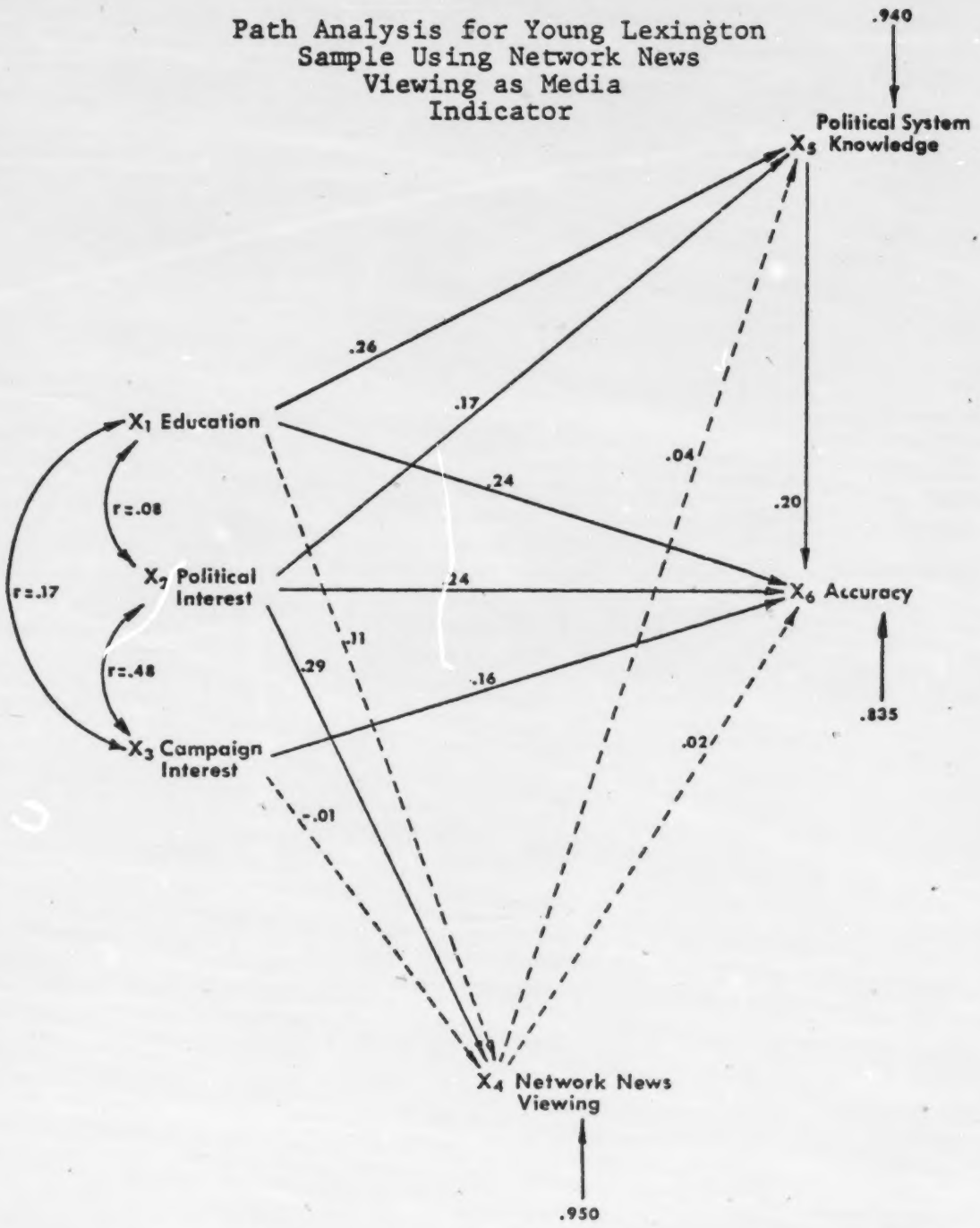
Neither does network news appear to affect political system knowledge for young voters (P = .04). This is consistent with the young Madison sample results.

The two young samples are also consistent in terms of the antecedents of viewing. For both, political interest is the strongest predictor of network news viewing, with a coefficient of .38 in the Madison sample and a coefficient of .29 in the Lexington sample. Education makes a similar modest contribution in both samples although the Lexington coefficient of .11 is not significant at the .01 level while the Madison coefficient of .13 is significant. Campaign interest has no impact in either sample.

This similarity in the pattern of antecedents for the two young samples, coupled with the strikingly contrasting pattern observed for the older Madison sample, strongly suggests that the null informational impact of network news cannot be explained in terms of viewer characteristics and implies that the explanation is inherent in the characteristics of the medium and the policies which shape network news content.

Figure 10

Path Analysis for Young Lexington Sample Using Network News Viewing as Media Indicator



DISCUSSION

Since path analysis cannot establish time order, the validity of these results is contingent upon the validity of the ordering of variables within the causal model. But given the order posited in the causal model the data support four general observations:

(1) Network news viewing has no discernible impact on either political accuracy or political system knowledge for either first-time or older voters. This null effect is not explained by audience characteristics.

(2) Public affairs newspaper use has an independent effect on both accuracy and political system knowledge for young, inexperienced voters, but not for older voters. Despite lower mean levels of readership, young voters appear to benefit more from newspaper use than do their elders.

(3) Public affairs magazine use affects accuracy, but not political system knowledge for both age groups, but the contribution is modest for first-time voters.

(4) Interest in the campaign predicts accuracy, independently of the more enduring characteristics of education and political interest, for first-time voters only, suggesting that the young are less fixed in their patterns of information-acquisition and more responsive to campaign stimuli than are their elders.

The Null Impact Of Network News

The finding that network news viewing has no impact on accuracy is consistent for all three samples. It also replicates the McClure and Patterson (1974) study of the same presidential election, as well as an earlier British study (Blumler and McQuail, 1969).

Some might fault the audience for this finding, noting the network

news audiences are less well-educated than users of the print media. This pattern holds in the data presented here for the older Madison sample. In fact, the negative weight of the path coefficient indicates that frequent news viewers are less well-educated than is the sample as a whole. There is no relationship between day-to-day political interest and network news viewing.

But explaining the null impact of network news in terms of the characteristics of its audience seems less appropriate when one considers the two young voter samples. For both samples, the path from education to network news viewing is positive. In the case of the Madison sample, it is statistically significant. The path from political interest to network news viewing is positive and statistically significant for both young samples. Conversely, the path from campaign interest is negative for both young samples and both positive and statistically significant for the older Madison sample. Thus, the antecedents of network news viewing are strikingly opposed for the young and older samples. Yet, the result is the same. Network news viewing has no impact on accuracy.

It appears then that the fault does not lie in the characteristics of the audience, but rather in some aspect of the stimulus. It is tempting to dismiss television as a visual and ephemeral medium better suited to entertainment than to the presentation of complex issue positions, but past research does not support such a characterization. Gains in accuracy have been related to such political televison presentations as British party programs (Blumler and McQuail, 1969) and the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates (Carter, cited in Katz and Feldman, 1962). In contrast to network news, both these television events were nonroutine and focused on issue content. This suggests that the failure of network news to

produce gains in political accuracy lies not in the general characteristics of television but in the format and content of the news program.

McClure and Patterson (1974) explain their findings in terms of content. According to their content analysis of the three network's news programs during the 1972 presidential campaign, the networks devoted an average of just 3% of available news minutes to coverage of the candidates' stands on the major issues of the campaign. Thus, it appears that lack of relevant content is the simplest explanation for the null informational impact of network news.

But it also appears that people have difficulty retaining information that is covered on network news. Stern (1971) found that half his sample of the audience of a network news program could not recall even one of the 19 news stories on the program shortly after the broadcast. Thus, it is possible that the format of network news depresses learning. The present format for network news includes a heavy emphasis on visuals and a great deal of switching from one visual focus to another, such as the movement from anchorperson to correspondent to filmed report to correspondent and back to anchorperson. This emphasis on visuals, and the changing of visuals in rapid succession, stems from an assumption by network executives that striking visuals are necessary to retain audience interest and maintain high audience ratings. But it is possible that continual shifts in visuals deflect attention and depress learning.

In future research, it would be appropriate to examine the impact of production variables, such as visual shifts, upon learning from television and such indicators of audience interest as feelings of arousal or boredom and channel-switching behavior. Such research also might involve the types of neuro-physiological, attention-orienting mechanisms elicited by differing production techniques.

It also seems important, in more general studies of political communication, to distinguish between routine mass media behavior, such as daily newspaper readership and network news viewing, and attention to nonroutine media events, such as debates and political conventions. It may be helpful also to differentiate between receivers who attend to the daily sources of political information out of sheer force of habit and those who are motivated by some nonroutine interest in a particular event or issue. Of all three samples, the young Madison voters appear to be the most likely to gain accurate perceptions of the candidates through newspaper use. They are also most likely to be motivated to read the newspaper by an interest in the campaign. The young Lexington sample appears to be motivated more by an interest in day-to-day political affairs. Accordingly, newspaper use is more strongly related to knowledge of the workings of the political system than to accurate perceptions of the presidential candidates for the young Lexington voters. This finding is merely suggestive as it does not hold for the older Madison sample, but it does point out the importance of considering the type of interest and attention given to mass media messages when assessing informational effects.

THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF THE NEWSPAPER

For young voters, the newspaper appears to be an important force toward broadening the distribution of both accurate information about candidates' issue stands and knowledge of the political system. However, the impact of public affairs newspaper use is nonsignificant for older voters. For the older sample, variations in accuracy and system knowledge can be accounted for largely by such enduring predispositional variables as education and day-to-day political interest. Public affairs magazine

readership is the only medium that affects the accuracy of older voters.

While the data generally support the argument that the well-educated are better equipped to process new political information because of their greater contextual knowledge of the political system, this pattern is more evident for older than for young voters. Not only is the link between education and system knowledge less substantial for young voters, but they also appear to gain system from newspaper use. The importance of newspaper use as an alternate channel for the acquisition of system knowledge is most striking in the case of the young Lexington sample. For example, day-to-day political interest, which is not significantly correlated with education, does not appreciably affect system knowledge, but the indirect path from political interest through newspaper use to political system knowledge is substantial. Thus, it appears that political interest contributes to system knowledge only when this interest is manifested in newspaper use.

Thus, for the young, the newspaper represents a breach in educationally-determined patterns of knowledge acquisition and, for the newspaper journalist, an opportunity to help broaden the distribution of knowledge among young voters.

The broad diffusion of political information is one of the traditional obligations of the press in an equalitarian, democratic political system. The potential of the newspaper to fulfill this obligation is apparent when one considers the fact that despite lower educational attainment, young voters are just as accurate as their elders.

The newspaper's potential is even more evident when one considers the possibility that the young person's first voting experience may be a crucial event in political socialization. As such, the experience of the first campaign might be expected to affect later interest in day-to-day

political affairs, a good predictor of both accuracy and political system knowledge among older voters. This type of causal linkage can be probed only by longitudinal research, but if such linkages exist, the newspaper may be part of the socializing experience. That is, the type of assistance the newspaper offers young voters during their first campaign may affect not only the quality of the immediate voting decision but the nature of later intervention in the electoral process.

Unfortunately, 18- to 24-year-olds read the newspaper less frequently than do older persons, and the rate of readership among the young appears to be declining precipitously. One analysis of two cross-sectional samples taken in 1967 and 1974 (Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, 1976) indicates that 71% of the 18- to 24-year-olds read a newspaper on a daily basis in 1967. By 1974, only 61% of this age group read a newspaper every day--a decline of 10%. Even more disturbing, this analysis shows no evidence of a maturation effect. Respondents who were 25- to 34-years old in 1974 were at the same readership level (71%) as were 18- to 24-year-olds in 1967--indicating no change. The comparison of cross-sectional samples, taken at different points in time, does not constitute definitive evidence for assertions about change.

However, a longitudinal study of 1669 high school seniors and their parents, interviewed in 1965 and reinterviewed in 1973, does provide such evidence (Jennings and Niemi, 1975). In 1965, less than half of the high school seniors reported daily newspaper reading. This figure did not change when the youths were reinterviewed eight years later. Thus, the decline in newspaper readership among the young appears to be a generational phenomeonon that will not be remedied as young people grow into "adult" patterns of newspaper readership. As such, it is disheartening data for

students of the democratic process, as well as for newspaper publishers.

Unlike network news, newspapers appear to inform their young audience. The newspaper's major problem appears to be in attracting this audience. Thus, the problem of declining newspaper readership, particularly among the young, should be a major focus of mass communication research during the next decade. Such research might consider the possibilities of different modes of marketing, distribution, and packaging, as well as modifications in content. Newly-available technologies suggest many types of change. For example, facsimile transmission and interactive cable television system would make it possible for a newspaper customer to order a custom-edited newspaper and have it delivered electronically. Micro-wave transmission systems make it possible for a newspaper to be printed at locations remote from editorial offices, enabling newspapers to serve areas that are regional, or national, in scope. All of these possibilities need to be evaluated in terms of economic feasibility, marketability, and implications for the democratic process.

The Impact Of The Public Affairs Magazine

The public affairs magazine is the only medium analyzed that affects accuracy for older voters. However, since education is the only significant predictor of magazine use and since it does not result in increased system knowledge, the public affairs magazine does not appear to have great potential for broadening the distribution of knowledge.

The contributions of magazine use to accuracy are more modest for the two young samples, and statistically nonsignificant for the Lexington sample. As in the older sample, magazine use makes no significant contribution to system knowledge among the young. Thus, the magazine appears to be a limted vehicle for the transmission of political information.

The Greater Reponsiveness Of The Young Voter

Generally, the older sample fits the minimalist pattern quite closely. Most of the variation in accuracy is accounted for by education, the path from education through political system knowledge, and day-to-day interest in politics. Of all the media examined, only public affairs magazine use appears to make any significant contribution to accuracy, and magazine use is best predicted by education.

Political system knowledge, which bears a strong relationship to accuracy, is determined almost entirely by non-media factors, most notably education.

But while older voters appear to be severely constrained by their social predispositions in their ability to acquire information about politics, young voters appear to be less constrained and more responsive to campaign stimuli. For example, campaign interest is a significant independent predictor of accuracy for both young samples, but not for the older sample. In the young Madison sample, this effect is enhanced considerably by the indirect path from campaign interest through newspaper use. In the Lexington sample, there is no relationship between campaign interest and newspaper use. The Lexington young voters appear to be motivated to read the newspaper by day-to-day political interest. Correspondingly, for the Lexington sample newspaper use has a somewhat greater impact on system knowledge than on accuracy. Taken together, these results suggest that young voters exhibit a closer relationship between motivation and newspaper effects than do older voters. This is consistent with findings by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White (1976) that young people tend not to be habitual newspaper readers. Instead, they tend to buy and read newspapers sporadically and selectively, more from specific informational needs from habit or a feeling of obligation to keep well-informed.

This resistance to habit is one of the qualities of the young that perplexes newspaper publishers, but it also may be one of the qualities that makes reaching this young audience so vital.

NOTES

1. This study was financed by the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation as part of a larger program of cross-national research on the young, first-time voter in Britain and America. This particular date set was collected und r the direction of Professor Jack M. McLeod, director of the Mass Communication Research Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

2. The Lexington data was collected under the direction of Professor William Elliott, then at the University of Kentucky's School of Human Communication. Professor Elliott is now at the University of Oregon.

3. The proportion of the total causal covariation between campaign interest (X_3) and accuracy (X_6) explained by the indirect path through newspaper use (X_4) was calculated in the following way:

   where variation explained by the indirect path is equal to

   $$(P_{43})\ (P_{64})$$

   and variation explained by the direct path is equal to

   $$P_{63}$$

   then, total causal covariation is equal to

   $$(P_{43})\ (P_{64}) + P_{63}$$

   and the proportion of total causal covariation explained by the indirect path is equal to

   $$\frac{(P_{43})\ (P_{64})}{(P_{43})\ (P_{64}) + P_{63}}$$

   This method is applied to all such calculations that follow.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS MAGAZINES

Newsmagazines

Time
Newsweek
U.S. News and World Report

Opinion Magazines

Progressive
New Republic
Nation
National Review
Atlantic Monthly
Harpers
Black World
Black Scholar
Saturday Review World
New York Review of Books

Underground and Liberation

Ramparts
Evergreen
Rolling Stone
Fusion
Creem
Ms.
Scharlet Letter

ACCURACY MEASURE

	Issue Statements	Nixon Agreement	McGovern Agreement
1.	We should pass a federal law legalizing abortion in every state.	no	no
2.	We should go ahead with plans for development of a new strategic bomber.	yes	no
3.	We should make sharp cuts in spending for defense.	no	yes
4.	The government should create jobs for heads of welfare families.	yes	yes
5.	The wage and price control program is weighted in favor of business and should be ended.	no	yes
6.	The federal government should guarantee a family of four an income of $4,000.	no	yes
7.	There should be a moratorium of bussing of school children to achieve integration.	yes	no
8.	Air quality standards cannot be stiffened because of adverse effects on industry.	no	no
9.	The federal government should divert money to local government for property tax relief.	yes	yes
10.	To increase employment, the federal government should grant businesses tax relief needed for expansion.	yes	no

APPENDIX B

Table 4

Unstandardized Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and F-Ratios for Regressions with Public Affairs Newspaper Use as X_4

	Madison Young Sample			Madison Older Sample		
	P	St.E.	F	P	St.E.	F
Regression on Accuracy						
Education	.44	.13	11.12*	.29	.12	6.22*
Political Interest	.57	.35	n.s.	.94	.51	3.41*
Campaign Interest	.70	.33	4.48*	.49	.41	n.s.
System Knowledge	.48	.14	11.19*	.55	.22	6.83*
Newspaper Use	1.12	.35	10.00*	.61	.53	n.s.
Regression on System Knowledge						
Education	.25	.06	17.35*	.24	.04	34.38*
Political Interest	.63	.15	17.72*	.58	.16	14.15*
Newspaper Use	.33	.16	4.02*	.31	.20	n.s.
Regression on Newspaper Use						
Education	.07	.02	8.42*	.04	.02	5.10*
Political Interest	.30	.06	23.30*	.30	.07	18.92*
Campaign Interest	.20	.06	10.58*	.05	.06	n.s.

*significant beyond the .01 level

Table 5

Unstandardized Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and F-Ratios for Regressions with Public Affairs Magazine Use as X_4: Madison

	Young Sample			Older Sample		
	P	St.E.	F	P	St.E.	F
Regression on Accuracy						
Education	.46	.13	12.12*	.23	.12	3.79*
Political Interest	.77	.34	5.10*	.90	.48	3.49*
Campaign Interest	.97	.33	8.91*	.35	.40	n.s.
Magazine Use	.46	.22	4.12*	.74	.28	7.23*
System Knowledge	.53	.14	13.94*	.64	.21	9.85*
Regression on System Knowledge						
Education	.27	.06	19.57*	.26	.04	41.57*
Political Interest	.74	.14	29.51*	.72	.15	23.49*
Magazine Use	.09	.11	n.s.	-.18	.11	n.s.
Regression on Magazine Use						
Education	.08	.03	4.78*	.08	.02	7.37*
Political Interest	.19	.09	3.60**	.19	.13	n.s.
Campaign Interest	.07	.10	n.s.	.16	.12	n.s.

*significant beyond the 0.1 level

**Significant beyond the .025 level. Since the undstandardized path coefficient is twice its standard error, this coefficient was considered significant.

Table 6

Unstandardized Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and F-Ratios for Regressions with Network News Viewing as X_4: Madison

	Young Sample			Older Sample		
	P	St.E.	F	P	St.E.	F
Regression on Accuracy						
Education	.49	.13	13.60*	.32	.12	7.21*
Political Interest	.83	.37	5.16*	1.12	.49	5.21*
Campaign Interest	.94	.33	8.19*	.42	.41	n.s.
System Knowledge	.55	.14	14.56*	.56	.21	6.96*
Network News	.02	.27	n.s.	.21	.36	n.s.
Regression on System Knowledge						
Education	.28	.06	21.06*	.25	.04	40.85*
Political Interest	.78	.15	28.29*	.65	.15	19.53*
Network News	.03	.13	n.s.	.24	.13	3.32**
Regression on Network News						
Education	.06	.03	4.03*	-.03	.02	n.s.
Political Interest	.44	.08	29.18*	-.01	.10	n.s.
Campaign Interest	-.12	.08	n.s.	.17	.09	3.69**

*significant beyond the .01 level

**significant beyond the .025 level. Since the unstandardized path coefficient is nearly twice its standard error, this coefficient was considered significant.

Table 7

Unstandardized Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and F-Ratios for Regressions with Newspaper Use as X_4: Lexington Sample

	P	St.E.	F
Regression on Accuracy			
Education	.62	.23	7.37*
Political Interest	.83	.43	3.66*
Campaign Interest	.85	.43	3.85*
System Knowledge	.41	.18	4.87*
Newspaper Use	.78	.44	3.11*
Regression on Political System Knowledge			
Education	.29	.11	7.40*
Political Interest	.22	.19	n.s.
Newspaper Use	.43	.21	4.05*
Regression on Newspaper Use			
Education	.11	.04	6.29*
Political Interest	.43	.08	8.61*
Campaign Interest	.06	.08	n.s.

*significant beyond the .01 level

Table 8

Unstandardized Path Coefficients, Standard Errors and F-Ratios for Regressions with Public Affairs Magazine Use as X_4: Lexington Sample

	P	St.E.	F
Regression on Accuracy			
Education	.70	.23	9.70*
Political Interest	1.06	.40	6.97*
Campaign Interest	.77	.43	3.15*
System Knowledge	.42	.18	5.18*
Magazine Use	.66	.39	n.s.
Regression on Political System Knowledge			
Education	.33	.10	10.17*
Political Interest	.33	.17	n.s.
Magazine Use	.33	.19	n.s.
Regression on Public Affairs Magazine Use			
Education	.00	.05	n.s.
Political Interest	.16	.09	n.s.
Campaign Interest	.05	.10	n.s.

*significant beyond the .01 level.

Table 9

Unstandardized Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and F-Ratios for Regressions with Network News Viewing as X_4: Lexington Sample

	P	St.E.	F
Regression on Accuracy			
Education	.68	.23	8.87*
Political Interest	1.12	.41	7.36*
Campaign Interest	.79	.44	3.29*
System Knowledge	.46	.18	6.36*
Network News Viewing	.09	.34	n.s.
Regression on Political System Knowledge			
Education	.33	.11	9.53*
Political Interest	.36	.18	4.12*
Network News Viewing	.09	.17	n.s.
Regression on Network News Viewing			
Education	.08	.06	n.s.
Political Interest	.31	.10	8.74*
Campaign Interest	.09	.11	n.s.

*significant beyond the .01 level.

Table 10

Intercorrelations between Variables in the Causal Model: Madison Young Sample

	Accuracy	Education	Political Interest	Campaign Interest	System Knowledge	Newspaper Use	Magazine Use	Network News Viewing
Accuracy	1.00	.36	.40	.32	.42	.44	.22	.17
Education		1.00	.18	.09	.34	.25	.17	.19
Political Interest			1.00	.47	.39	.45	.15	.37
Campaign Interest				1.00	.11	.38	.03	.09
System Knowledge					1.00	..33	.15	.16
Newspaper Use						1.00	.20	.32
Magazine Use							1.00	.08
Network News Viewing								1.00

.99

Table 11

Intercorrelations between Variables in the Causal Model: Madison Older Sample

	Accuracy	Education	Political Interest	Campaign Interest	System Knowledge	Newspaper Use	Magazine Use	Network News Viewing
Accuracy	1.00	.40	.41	.30	.44	.30	.32	.07
Education		1.00	.29	.20	.51	.27	.28	-.07
Political Interest			1.00	.58	.43	.40	.27	.06
Campaign Interest				1.00	.21	.19	.25	.16
System Knowledge					1.00	.32	.10	.10
Newspaper Use						1.00	.27	.12
Magazine Use							1.00	.08
Network News Viewing								1.00

Table 12

Intercorrelations between Variables in the Causal Model: Lexington Sample

	Accuracy	Education	Political Interest	Campaign Interest	System Knowledge	Newspaper Use	Magazine Use	Network News Viewing
Accuracy	1.00	.34	.39	.36	.35	.37	.24	.18
Education		1.00	.08	.17	.28	.22	.03	.13
Political Interest			1.00	.48	.21	.46	.20	.29
Campaign Interest				1.00	.18	.20	.14	.15
System Knowledge					1.00	.29	.19	.14
Newspaper Use						1.00	.14	.30
Magazine Use							1.00	.08
Network News Viewing								1.00

.68